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Proxy Wars: Implications of Great-power Rivalry for the Onset and Duration of Civil War

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Abstract:

The bulk of social science theories explaining civil war focus on endogenous factors, generally ignoring the systemic effects of superpower rivalry during the Cold War, or great power politics associated with regional rivalries and ambitions. The question of proxiness of civil wars also potentially challenges notions of commitment and time-inconsistency problems associated with explanations of why rational agents fail to find less costly bargains compared with costly fighting. Despite much historical evidence about intervention of great powers either overtly or covertly in civil wars, theories of civil war have only focused on the in-country ills that apparently determine violence. These models, however, have only had very limited predictive power. Can it be that systemic factors and great power politics make civil war in distant places and strategic sites more feasible due to proxy intervention? Examining these issues is all the more critical today because the multipolar world emerging out of the Cold War era promises to generate proxy struggles in a world where the costs of fighting directly are very high. While the study of civil war moves in the direction of disaggregating in order to understand micro processes associated with rebellion, it might also be prudent to aggregate up to understand the macro processes in multilevel-level models because the feasibility of fighting over not fighting are likely to be decided at higher rather than lower levels of aggregation.

> ***It would be the policy of the United States to support free people who are resisting attempted subjugation by armed minorities or by outside pressures.*** Harry S. Truman, March 12, 1947. Speech to US Congress, which later became the Truman Doctrine.
>
> ***[w]hen external and internal forces hostile to socialism try to turn the development of a given socialist country in the direction of…the capitalist system...this is no longer merely a problem for that country's people, but a common problem, the concern of all socialist countries***. Leonid Brezhnev, November 12, 1968. Speech to the United Polish Workers Party, which subsequently became the Brezhnev Doctrine. Cited in Ouimet (2003: 69).
>
> ***We oppose war, but we support the anti-imperialist wars waged by oppressed peoples. We support the revolutionary wars waged in Cuba and Algeria. We also support the anti-US imperialist war conducted by the South Vietnamese people.*** Mao Zedong, June 23, 1964. Statement made to Chilean journalists on Chinese support for national liberation movements. Cited in Hershberg (1995/1996: 239).

1. Introduction

Despite the intense study of civil war and political violence in the social sciences, the systemic effects of great power rivalry, or the geopolitics of great powers are not theoretically identified, nor scrutinized empirically until quite recently (Albornoz and Hauk 2014, Hironaka 2005, Kalyvas and Balcells 2010). As Andrew Mumford (2013: 111) writes, "proxy wars have been far more prominent in the past and present of warfare than the academic literature, policy debates or journalism has acknowledged." The bulk of civil war studies, particularly during the Cold War, focused on structural factors, the role of ideological struggle and revolution by the masses, or ethnic minority rebellions against discrimination (Gurr 1970, Horowitz 2000, Lichbach 1989, Scott 1976, Skocpol 1979). Many identified the lack of modernization as the problem, particularly problems associated with state making, the inability to generate economic development, the lack of democracy, and low state capacities for addressing political grievances (Huntington 1968, Olson 1963, Rostow 1960, Tilly 1985). While overt and covert superpower support in these civil wars, such as in Vietnam, Afghanistan, and several other sites around the globe are glaring examples, the general effect of the Cold War rivalry rarely enter analyses

centrally, whether regarding the instigation of civil war or its durability. Indeed, US policymakers are sometime portrayed as hapless victims in search of stability (Kissinger 1959). American diplomatic historians, on the other hand, have focused directly on the foreign policy actions of the US and the USSR in terms of how rivalry caused, sustained, and sometimes ended Third World wars (Gaddis 1997, Jones 2001, LaFeber 1983, Westad 2007). Some even term the Cold War the "third world´s war" (Ferguson 2010). To what extent is superpower rivalry and the involvement of great powers (regional powers) in the politics of others undervalued in the theoretical and empirical study of civil war? How might we incorporate the idea of proxy war in the study of civil war to broaden the general understanding of how civil wars occur and end? Indeed, according to many observers, we are entering a multipolar era where the strategic objectives of great powers are likely to be played out in proxy wars (Mumford 2013, Sawers 2016). As Kalevi Holsti (1996:127) has put it "intervention of one kind, or the other, has become the norm" in international relations.

2. The international system and civil war

Structural realists pin their analyses of international relations on the configuration of power in the global system (Gilpin 1981, Organski and Kugler 1980, Waltz 2001). These scholars, though preoccupied with great power politics and questions of interstate war, focus on system polarity as a defining factor explaining interstate behaviour related to the search for security and relative advantage vis-à-vis other powers through geopolitical struggle, alliance politics, and the peddling of influence. Indeed, international conflict is viewed as a form of rivalry that relates to issues of geopolitical expansion and territorial security (Colaresi and Thompson 2002, Rasler and Thompson 2006). The Cold War period of extreme bipolarity is generally thought of as being special. This bipolar world began immediately following the end of World War II, lasting roughly 40 years and is characterised by intense superpower rivalry between the United

States and the Soviet Union, explained simply as the natural outcome of a bipolar concentration of power in the international system (Waltz 2000). Indeed, Marquis Alexis de Tocqueville, predicted the Cold War almost two hundred years before by writing:

> "There are now two great nations in the world…the Russians and the Anglo-Americans…Each seems called by some secret design of providence one day to hold in its hands the destinies of half the world" (Cited in Gaddis 1997: 1).

The "secret design of providence" de Tocqueville refers to is possibly his astute assessment of the power that these two countries would one day muster judging simply by their enormous geographical size, potential population growth, and access to natural resources; i.e. the ingredients of economic and military power.

Alexis de Tocqueville´s prophecy came to pass when the wartime alliance between the US and the USSR broke down immediately following the defeat of Nazi Germany in 1945. In effect, the US and the USSR emerged as the two most powerful states based on military might and productive capacity. Given the devastation of Europe and the threat of Soviet expansion, the US could not retreat into isolationism, as it had done after the First World War. Inevitably, the US designs for the post-war global order clashed with the Soviet vision. This clash can be traced to the fundamental antipathies between the US´s liberal vision of a world order and the Soviet vision premised on World revolution, now steered by a mistrustful Stalin that hoped to bring security to the USSR by annexing territory (Gaddis 1997). As Westad (2007) notes, superpower rivalry was also driven by underlying sympathies within both camps for extending their own versions of modernity to other nations throughout the world. According to many historians, thus, the Cold war represents a struggle for 'world domination' by two superpowers, who now each possessed nuclear weapons that could have destroyed the planet in any potential direct armed confrontation (Brodie 1973, Mueller 1995, Snow 1987). The fact that the Cold War ended without a major power war has led some to refer to this period as the "long peace", but the rest of the world was hardly peaceful, nor spared the effects of superpower struggle

(David 1997, Gaddis 1989). Unable to fight each other directly because of mutual assured destruction (MAD), the superpowers fought "proxy wars" throughout the world, often by directly intervening with troops and by actively supporting one or another´s side with material assistance (Halperin 1963, Mumford 2013, Snow 1996).

Reluctant to confront the USSR militarily, the US adopted a strategy of containment based on the advice of the long-time Soviet expert George F. Kennan, who advised the administration in the infamous "long telegram" to Washington to draw a line in the sand and resist further Soviet expansion outside its sphere of influence. The fall of China to communism and the Korean war highlighted the need for resisting communist aggression across the world, even to try to "roll back" communist influence where it had taken root. The US saw communist infiltration as a major threat to national security because poor, premodern societies around the world were thought to be vulnerable to communist propaganda, and these nations, particularly in Latin America, South East Asia and Africa were expected to fall like dominoes. The domino theory in turn provoked the US to act to fight communist/Soviet expansion everywhere vigorously, because failure to act in one location meant its inevitable spread to others (Jones 2001, Westad 2007). An extremely distrustful Soviet leadership saw US actions in the same way that the US viewed the Soviets, as expansionist and hostile to communism. As Westad 2007: 72) writes:

> By the early 1960s, Soviet ideology had already reached a stage where the competition for influence in the Third World was an essential part of the existence of socialism … The Soviet Union´s role was to help make the world safe for revolution.

Indeed, the Cold War led to the development of elaborate security apparatuses in both countries, geared to fight an existential struggle, spanning the globe (Westad 2007).[1] By the time President

[1] For excellent recent histories of the activities of the CIA, see Kinzer, Stephen. 2013. *The Brothers: John Foster Dulles, Alan Dulles, and Their Secret World War*. New York: Times Books, Prados, John. 2006. *Safe for Democracy: The Secret Wars of the Cia*. Chicago, IL:

Eisenhower left office, he was to warn of a military-industrial complex driving US foreign policy because of the arms race that had developed and the fear that escalation of tensions would make war between the superpowers inevitable. President Truman´s statement quoted above reflects the logic of the Truman Doctrine, but the same can be said of the Brezhnev Doctrine, and the Chinese communists´ commitment to support national liberation movements as cited in Chairman Mao´s statement above. The Soviet-Chinese rivalry also drove both sides to buy influence in the politics of many newly-liberated countries (Westad 2007). It is not just the Cold War superpower rivalry that may affect civil wars in an exogenous manner, but all great power aspirants that see themselves as regional and global powers generally influence the foreign and domestic politics of other states, which relate to the onset of violence, particularly in weak-state environments. Before understanding the phenomenon of proxy war, I examine the theoretical bases on which the issue of proxiness makes sense in extant explanations of civil war.

3. Theory: Non-endogenous sources of civil war feasibility

As stated earlier, until recently, most studies of civil war and political violence focused on theories of revolution, where Cold War conflicts in the Third World are characterized as peasant revolts, revolutions of rising expectations, and as ethnic and class wars, much of it driven by the desire of ordinary people to be free of repressive states (Gurr 1970). These theories came under criticism from scholars of rational choice because where revolutions and revolts were expected, they mostly failed to materialize (Tullock 1987). Rational choice theorists argued that people don't just revolt against states because the "logic of collective action" prevented people from organizing costly conflict against states (Skocpol 1979, Tullock 1971). As Gordon Tullock (1987: 53) put it:

Ivan R. Dee Publishers, Weiner, Tim. 2007. *The Legacy of Ashes: The History of the Cia*. New York: Doubleday.

> In the mythology of revolution, the people rising to throw off a tyrannical ruler is the dominant theme ... Most of the mythology concerns a people driven beyond endurance by the vicious oppression of their masters rising up and establishing a noble and just republic. I regret to say that this myth is mainly myth.

The most recent attack on theories addressing the causes of war as based on political and social "grievances", or as "justice-seeking" movements, came in the form of several publications from the World Bank. Paul Collier, as the head of the World Bank´s development research section, generated what is now some of the most widely-cited studies on civil war. Collier and colleagues argued that what explained conflict is what enabled large finances for conducting war against organized state forces. In other words, their insight bound factors that generate large violence, the ability to generate rebel income, and the motivation to join rebellion in one source that also solved the collective action problem. People join rebellions for its relative financial attraction and rebellions exist because they can be financed, largely through what Collier termed "quasi-criminal" activity (Collier 2000). Instead of "justice-seeking", conflict could be explained by "loot-seeking" behaviour. The empirical analyses showed that typically grievance-causing factors, such as the lack of democracy and income inequality, did not predict the outbreak of conflict as much as did the availability of lootable income, such as natural resources, and widespread poverty (Collier and Sambanis 2005, Collier, Hoeffler and Rohner 2009, Collier and Hoeffler 2001). Poverty mattered because it lowered the opportunity costs of individuals to engage in costly forms of behaviour and because it lowered the costs of rebel labour. However one might argue against the view that rebellion is only about groups forming to profit from war, the basic insight from the World Bank´s studies are clear—conflict requires finance to be feasible! Violence, in other words, *has* to be funded.

Many others confirmed the basic findings of the World Bank studies, which is that grievance-causing factors mattered less that opportunity for rebellion, or feasibility-related

factors (de Soysa 2002, Fearon and Laitin 2003). However, rather than loot-seeking as a motivation for war, others pointed out that what matters is state capacity because a civil war only exists due to a state´s loss of monopoly over the use of force. Poverty, captured by income per capita, proxies a weak state because it limits the amount of taxes that allow a state to be administratively efficient. Weak states, thus, are easily targeted by armed groups because of the technology of insurgency, which favours small bands of lightly-armed groups against (dis)organized state forces (Fearon and Laitin 2003). Thus, rather than simply the availability of lootable income, such as natural resources, poverty and the availability of natural resources capture features of weak state capacity for preventing and overcoming insurgency (de Soysa and Neumayer 2007, Fearon 2005). Since insurgency is a cheap form of warfare and does not require much finance, the weak state/insurgency explanation and Collier´s "looting rebels" explanation dominate theoretical and empirical discussions of civil war. Indeed, empirical studies generally report robust results only for a handful of variables. Despite the heavy theorizing, empirical models of civil war have poor predictive power (Hegre and Sambanis 2006, Ward, Greenhill and Bakke 2010). Is leaving out exogenous sources of civil war, particularly systemic factors and power rivalries, a weakness of existing explanations?

The studies discussed above have generally theorized about the endogenous sources of civil war. They explicitly focus on individual and state-level factors. Theories of conflict, particularly of conflict duration, view armed conflict as a result of bargaining failure (Fearon 1995). Rational actors engage in this costly, seemingly-irrational form of behaviour because each side has little incentive to negotiate with the other due to the so-called commitment problem. Conflicts, particularly of an ethnic nature persist because of bargaining failure. Each side cannot trust the other to keep their word. Fearon and Laitin (2010), for example, argue that the longest civil wars are those which they call "sons of the soil" conflicts, where a small territorially-based minority fights a majority-controlled state because of in-migration by the

majority into minority "homelands." These "ethnic" conflicts last long because the rebels do not trust the government to keep its word after rebels disband. Importantly, these studies found no difference between the Cold War era marked by intense superpower rivalry, a view generally not shared by US diplomatic historians, who write about the Cold War as an era of proxy war in a global geopolitical and ideological struggle. Fearon (2003: 77-78) writes:

> The prevalence of civil war in the 1990s is not due to the end of the Cold War and associated changes in the international system.

While many empirical studies try to model exogenous sources of finance, for example, from ethnic diasporas, the effects of the Cold War do not enter the analyses directly. Typically, empirical studies employ a dummy variable capturing the Cold War era, which most find not to matter compared with the post-Cold War era. Curiously, however, these studies also report that previous conflict experience is a strong predictor of future conflict. These results were generally explained as the effects of the accumulation of "conflict-specific capital" in the form of hatreds, left-over stockpiles of weapons, and the perpetuation of poverty (Collier et al. 2003). Surely then, the Cold War era might have mattered in terms of lingering effects of Cold War era conflict? Indeed, some historians trace the origins of many of today´s conflicts to the geopolitics of the Cold War (Westad 2007). What exactly is conflict-specific capital and how important it this for making conflict feasible? The role of great power politics in the instigation and duration of civil war has been a noticeably absent notion in the study of the causes of internal political violence and civil war. At least one recent study that addresses the question of overt and covert CIA and KGB support to countries during the Cold War reports that CIA interventions have long-term consequences for democratization (Berger et al. 2013a). Why then might such interventions not affect the long-term conflict-proneness of countries?

Recently, at least two sets of studies have looked directly at Cold War factors to explain the nature of civil war during the Cold War. The first looks at how partisan politics in the United

States helped to drive civil war during the Cold War years (Albornoz and Hauk 2014). Albornoz and Hauk argue that Republican US presidents were more likely to be hawkish and intervene in the internal struggles of other countries militarily, particularly when their popularity at home was low. They show statistical evidence in support of their proposition, and find that Republican presidents were more likely to use the CIA in overt and covert operations abroad. I do not directly address the veracity of this issue and the nature of the empirical evidence, but to think that superpower rivalry beginning with President Truman, a Democrat, whose policy of containment is an artefact of US domestic politics rather than the grave rivalry developing with the USSR does considerable violence to history. While it is true that Republican presidents were more likely to use force abroad, whether they were more likely to start civil wars is a novel and perhaps more difficult proposition to demonstrate. However, the subject of diversionary war is prominent in terms of theories of international war and could possibly be more closely examined in this context in the future (Ostrom and Job 1986).

Others look at the Cold War era to explain the changing nature of civil war, particularly in terms of the features of war fighting itself, usually addressed in terms of the technology of warfare (Balcells and Kalyvas 2014, Kalyvas and Balcells 2010). Kalyvas and Balcells (2010, 2014) argue that during the Cold War, insurgents and governments were bolstered by superpower support, which led to a form of robust insurgency, characterized as relatively large formation irregular war, supported by masses of people—the so-called "peoples' wars" or wars of national liberation. They argue that these wars often led to rebel victories. States, they argue, often win against primitive rebellions, which are characterized by loosely-organized bands of insurgents that are able to take advantage of rough terrain and hit-and-run tactics. Their main argument about the post-Cold War era is that absent Cold War support, states and rebels are symmetrically balanced, leading to wars that are conventionally fought, but due to the lack of external support and ideologically-motivated movements, they are less disciplined. They call

these types of war symmetric non-conventional wars characterizing today´s conflicts. They criticize the view expounded by Fearon and Laitin (2003) that the technology of insurgency is a constant, but rather that the mode of financing war, in other words its financial feasibility, shapes the nature of war fighting. Thus, the Cold War era conflicts for them were more disciplined because of the constraining factors attached to support from superpowers. It is of course quite hard to evaluate whether superpower-supported conflicts were less bloody and less harmful to civilian interests than the current conflicts without closer analysis of data. Today we have a globalized media with twenty-four-hour coverage and pictures that were absent during the conflict in Biafra, Guatemala, and Nicaragua, not to mention a great deal of civilian suffering in Vietnam. More importantly, however, this study too ignores the nature of funding from other great powers, particularly regional powers, of both post-Cold War and Cold War conflicts.

Consider for example the so-called ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, which started off in the mid-to-late 1970s with violence breaking out among several rival Tamil-minority rebel groups, which fought each other and the state for supremacy and the allegiance of the Tamil population. Out of several rebel groups, many of them sworn enemies of the others, The Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) under the leadership of Vellupillai Prabakharan gained supremacy, largely due to training and funding received from the Indian government and the regional government of Tamil Nadu in India (Narayan Swamy 2010). The LTTE used largely hit-and-run tactics against a weak Sri Lankan military and survived narrowly by avoiding defeat for decades, slowly building up a base of off shore funding by taxing the Tamil diaspora abroad and acquiring legal and illegal businesses.[2] After 20 years, the group emerged as a major conventional force, commanding finances of almost 350 million dollars in revenue per year,

[2] Prabakharan narrowly escaped capture on two occasions by fleeing to India, where he was even jailed for a brief period.

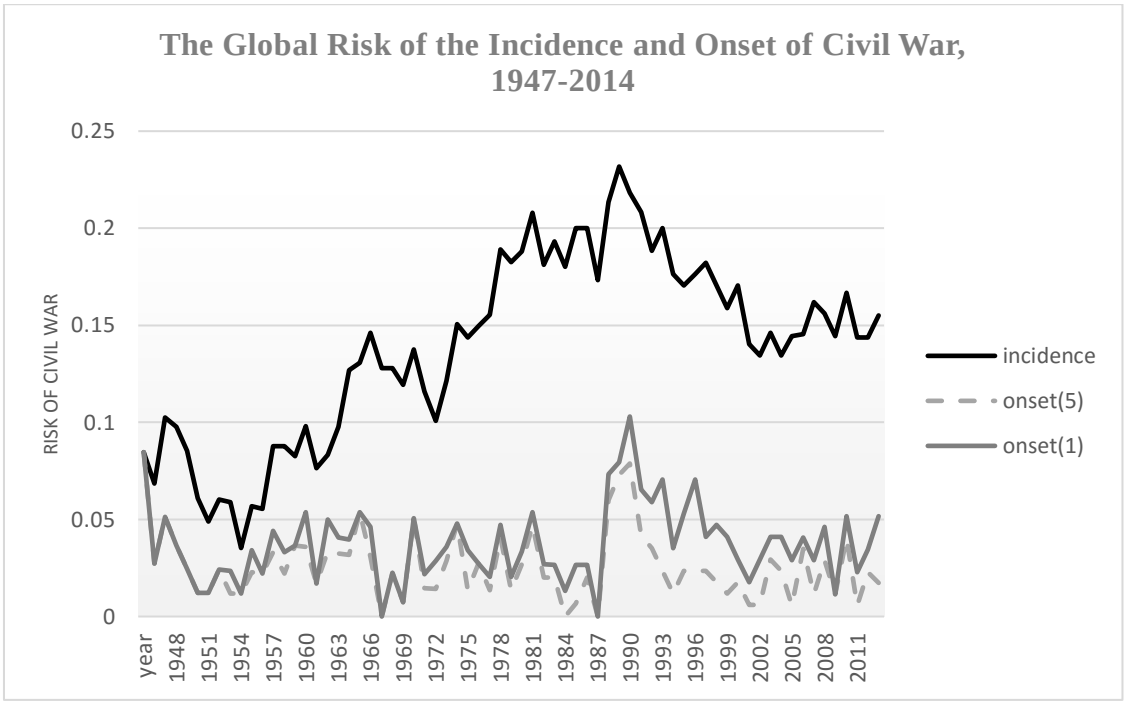
and even defeating the Sri Lankan army in several conventional pitched battles. Yet, in May 2009, after several rounds of failed negotiations, the LTTE was decisively beaten on the battle field, and its entire leadership either killed or captured in the space of a few months. Why? In this case, by simply studying the changing technology of war fighting, it is not clear how an extremely astute rebel leader, Vellupillai Prabakharan, who built up one of the most formidable rebel armies and survived 30 years of intensive insurgency, would face such a crushing defeat. Nor is it clear where the lessons of war fighting reveals about micro processes. Why was a successful technology suddenly proven wanting? It is also unclear why knowing how the war was fought tell us much about its origins, or the motivations of people that did not join the movement, or why some of the LTTE´s forces defected to the state, or other micro-processes of value? One very strong plausible reason for the defeat of the LTTE after 9/11 was simply how international systemic factors and great power politics of the region turned against the LTTE and made war making difficult. The so-called ethnic war in Sri Lanka is best explained in terms of dynamics relating to how proxy war support matters, where proxy-war dynamics explain why bargaining failure occurs, and how war is made feasible, often for reasons lying in exogenous factors rather than the local. It is hard, at least from the Sri Lankan illustration, to conclude that the nature of external support for war alone can shape the way they are fought.

I approach the Cold War´s effects on civil war in a similar light, from the point of view of how superpower struggle increased the feasibility of groups to organize violence. Rebels and states face endogenous and exogenous, or systemic constrains for initiating and sustaining war. The European peace in the post-War years might not be explained only because the issues that drove civil wars in Europe had suddenly dissipated, but rather as a direct result of the hegemony of the United States, in its own sphere of influence, and the Soviet Union, in its own sphere of influence. Superpower rivalry elsewhere provide ample room for further understanding how small wars got generated and sustained over long periods of time. The decline of organized

violence in the post-Cold War world may not mean that external factors matter less in this era, but the argument is that absent superpower rivalry, the enabling environment for civil wars, although diminished, may also increase space for other powers, such as India, China, Iran, and Saudi Arabia, not to mention powerful non-state actors, to fill systemic vacuums and further geopolitical interests by supporting proxy wars. According to many, an era of proxy war due to great-power geopolitics is already intensifying (Klare 2008, Sawers 2016). Civil war theory may need to incorporate the external with internal politics in an inverted version of "two-level games" as espoused in many theories of international politics (Putnam 1988).

Looking simply at the trend in the incidence and onsets of civil wars in the post-war years is illustrative because one can examine the temporal and spatial patterns to clue us into the systemic factors that may in fact be driving them. The past few decades have seen a noticeable decline of violence, accentuated sharply since the dissolution of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War (Fearon and Laitin 2003, Gleditsch 2008). Figure 1 displays the trends in conflicts, where at least 25 deaths have occurred in a single year between 1946 and 2014.

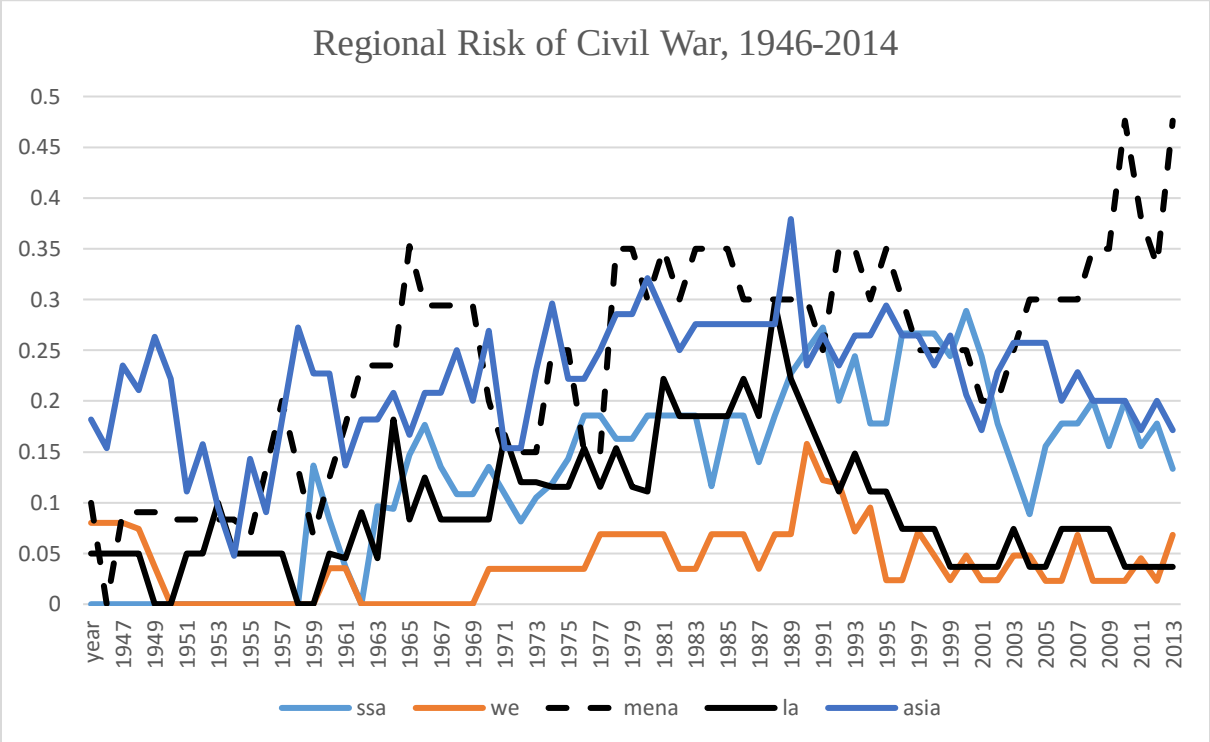
Figure 1.



Source: UCDP (2016) armed conflict incidence an onset determined at 25 battle deaths and above.

Clearly, something about the Cold War era mattered—greatly. As more countries gradually entered the international system as independent entities after the end of World War II, there was commensurately a steady increase in the risk of civil war, much of it because of the accumulation of ongoing wars over time. This trend is replicated by data that use different battle-death thresholds to identify wars (Fearon and Laitin 2003; Balcells and Kalyvas 2014). The risk peaked around 1991 and thereafter declined sharply. This peak is often explained as the sudden onsets of the "end of empire" wars with the dissolution of the USSR and Yugoslavia (Kalyvas and Balcells 2010). However, the two lines at the bottom of the figure show that onsets of civil war during and after the Cold War remain fairly uniform. This temporal pattern, while suggesting that the Cold War mattered, and that many conflicts have died since 1991, reveals a fairly limited picture. The geographical variation in conflict during and after the Cold War, however, potentially reveals more. Figure 2, shows the regional trends in civil war since World War II. As seen there,

Figure 2.



Source: UCDP (2016) armed conflict incidence an onset determined at 25 battle deaths and above.

the most noticeable drop in the risk of civil war since 1990 has been in Latin America. East and South East Asia, which had the highest risk in the early days of the Cold War has also declined. Indeed, Latin America and East and South East Asia were hot superpower battle grounds and several of the countries in these regions hosted US and Soviet bases, surrogate states of both superpowers, and they hosted wars in which the superpowers directly intervened. Simply examining endogenous factors in Latin America would not reveal why Latin American wars have now diminished to nothing. Almost all regions have seen declines except for North Africa and Middle East (MENA), which has had a relatively high but steady risk throughout the Cold War period, but it suddenly rises steeply after the September 11th 2001 terrorist attacks on the US and the subsequent war on terror. Again, this highly stylized view from the trend data suggest something about the importance of great power politics as it affects the systemic risk of civil war. Why the MENA region should see such a massive increase the year following the 9/11 attacks cannot just be coincidental, nor the sudden decline of civil war in Latin American be explained easily only by factors endogenous to the individual countries in the region, many of which are plagued by poverty, high inequality, and high levels of interpersonal violence, or conditions often associated with state failure and war (Rivera 2016).

4. Great power rivalry & proxy war theory

Many have argued that endogenous factors alone might be fairly poor at explaining why civil war occurs (Gleditsch 2007, Gleditsch et al. 2010). These studies correctly point out that conflicts may cluster in space, spill over borders, cut-across ethnic and political groups that straddle borders, and be supported and sustained by transnational sources of finance, including issues relating to interdependencies among rebel groups and the consequences of refugee flows. These studies, however, focus on geographic interdependence between conflicts and dynamics

related to wars in the neighbourhood spilling over. There is little work that directly address proxy aspects of civil war, both in terms of theory and empirics. Nor have any studies, as far as I am aware, incorporated regional power rivalries when modelling the risk of civil war onset and duration. I address some areas in empirical research that may begin to address these concerns. First, however, I look at the idea of proxy war and its implications for civil war research.

The Oxford Living Dictionary online (OLD) defines a proxy war as "a war instigated by a major power which does not itself become involved."[3] Indeed, all the "example sentences" provided by OLD relate to the Cold War funding of civil wars by the two superpowers. Andrew Mumford (2013: 11) writes,

> "Proxy wars are the indirect engagement in a conflict by third parties wishing to influence its strategic outcome…in short, proxy wars are the logical replacement for states seeking to further their own strategic goals yet at the same time avoid engaging in direct, costly and bloody warfare."

A proxy war thus is a war fought at the behest of a third party. It is hard to imagine, thus, that the Cold War strategic struggles between the two superpowers would not have had an influence on almost all countries decolonizing from former empires, or that political rivals jostling for power were unlikely to tap into sources of support from outside. Proxy wars are fought not just by great powers willing a war but by actively participating in the instigation and support of specific groups. These wars are fought by extending direct support, such as the supply of one´s own nationals as combatants, training of indigenous combatants and mercenaries, supply of weapons and other material, logistical support, safe havens, and political support among other great powers, and support for surrogates in international fora (Mumford 2013). As direct confrontation between super/major/regional powers has become costlier in terms of the

[3] See https://en.oxforddictionaries.com/definition/proxy_war (accessed 15, January 2017).

violation of international law and norms and in terms of finances, the inclination to deploy proxies has strengthened.

The readiness of great powers to get involved in local affairs is not lost on local actors either. During the Cold War, many leaders of countries, such as Israel, Egypt, Algeria, Vietnam, and many independent African states, switched sides at one time or another based, not on ideological commitment to one side or the other, but on expected support as a result of geopolitical struggle. It is undeniable that several conflicts were begun directly by the Superpowers, such as the US´s funding of the Contra rebels against the Soviet-backed *Sandanista* regime in Nicaragua, or the CIA´s support for the Mujahedin fighters in Afghanistan. The CIA and the KGB actively sought to destabilize each other´s proxy regimes in Latin America, Asia and Africa. Given this situation, one needs also to ask whether rebels might have appeared in some places without the knowledge that a potential patron might be interested in your cause, willing to bankroll the movement. As an example, Vellupilai Prabakharan, the leader of the LTTE guerrilla movement in Sri Lanka was initially strongly Marxist before he became a committed ethnic separatist, possibly as a way to attract Soviet attention since the then Sri Lankan government flirted with the idea of offering the US government a very strategic base at Trincomalee harbour (Narayan Swamy 2010). Clearly, knowing if a superpower, or regional power, in this case India, might support you is endogenous to the decision to rebel and affects the process of bargaining. Indeed, it is hard to imagine rebel advantages in battle against the organized forces of governments without external support.

One interesting issue around proxy wars is that even if the some of the central issues are related directly to the warring parties, such as the desire for more political rights, or ethnic group emancipation from discrimination, the paymasters are able by and large to pull the strings of these wars in ways which may constrain a domestic bargain. Since great powers can simply use their financial and political muscle, they can in many instances also pull the plug on

fighting. For example, Morton Halperin, writing in 1963, argued that "local wars" involving the superpowers did not have the potential to escalate into all-out war because the US and Soviets had extremely limited aims for a number of reasons. He suggested four main reasons for why superpower proxy wars remain limited. First, both powers had fairly limited foreign policy interests in the countries that required their assistance. Secondly, they had a mutual desire to avoid nuclear confrontation, for avoiding a regional or global conflagration over a distant war. Third, both parties understood the role of force; they both subscribed to the idea that fighting must be limited, for limited aims, so as to avoid escalation, and fourthly, the domestic aims of the two countries and the public sentiment were directed at avoiding war rather than open confrontation. Indeed, Balcells and Kalyvas (2014) suggest that Cold War conflicts were "tamer" because they ended in rebel victory due to robust insurgency and the ideological nature of the movements, but it could very well be because of the restraining influence of superpowers, who avoided the dangers of direct confrontation, an issue that may not similarly concern all great powers that may fight a proxy war, such as we have seen in the case of Indian involvement in Sri Lanka, Syrian involvement in Lebanon, Russian involvement in Syria and the Ukraine recently, nor the Saudi involvement in Yemen.

5. Conclusions

Until recently, the idea that civil wars in the Third World might be instigated and nurtured by the strategic interests of great powers rarely entered theoretical and empirical discussions of the general causes of political violence and rebellion. This issue is all the more surprising given the heavy focus of Sovietologists and US diplomatic historians on the idea of superpower rivalry as a cause of internal conflicts in peripheral countries. The social science scholarship on civil war has generally avoided the inclusion of superpower rivalry and great power geopolitical struggle directly in explanations of civil war. Many descriptions of the concerns of the US and

the USSR, which were locked in a deadly existential struggle during the Cold War treats peripheral wars in the Third World as a nuisance in the US´s search for global stability (Halperin 1963, Kissinger 1959). In the words of Donald Snow, Third World civil wars were "distant thunder" with no vital national interests at stake for superpowers (Snow 1997). Yet, the exigencies of superpower rivalry and the "necessary peace" in terms of avoiding direct confrontation with each other, the superpowers fought proxy wars by challenging each other for influence in distant places (Snow 1987). Indeed, some historians of US foreign relations see the Cold War era struggles between the superpowers as "global war" (Ferguson 2010, Westad 2007). Others have identified the conscious policies of the US of supporting capitalist dictators during the Cold War as a recipe for violence (LaFeber 1983). Recently, Cold War era civil wars have entered analyses directly (Albornoz and Hauk 2014, Kalyvas and Balcells 2010). The interest in the Cold War from the angle of civil war theory has focused on the quality of the war, juxtaposing post-Cold War conflicts as being different. Despite the heavy focus on opportunity factors, or the feasibility of rebellion as one of the critical reasons for why civil war occurs, very little theorizing has directly incorporated great power rivalry and systemic effects on the risk of civil war from the angle of how proxy war drives the feasibility of organizing violence.

Recent data on superpower activity in terms of CIA and KGB support to surrogate regimes in the developing world, offers the opportunity for future studies to probe interesting propositions about the causes and effects of proxy wars (Berger et al. 2013a, Berger et al. 2013b). Indeed, data on great power rivalry also allows scholars to broaden the scope of understanding how systemic effects compound problems of political violence in countries in terms of geopolitical, ethnic, or religiously-motivated rivalries (Thompson 2001). Before this can happen, however, a proper understanding of how proxy wars are fought and what it means to existing theory of civil war needs to be more closely examined. Recent research on civil war,

perhaps correctly, has moved in the direction of disaggregating country-level factors, using sophisticated GIS methodology to understand the spread of fighting and other dynamic processes. Such efforts might very well be supplemented with understanding processes that aggregate up in two-level models because ultimately, great powers and powers with ambitions of regional hegemony have rarely remained disinterested agents in the political misfortunes of other countries, particularly since organized violence is financially costly and often driven by stakes large enough to warrant the interests of powerful state and non-state actors. Unfortunately, the issue of proxy war has thus far been neglected in the theoretical and empirical models of civil war. Incorporating great power politics is likely to increase our understanding of why civil wars occur and how they are fought, an enterprise that has begun to take shape with recent scholarship (Kalyvas and Balcells 2010).

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